

Samuil Lubarsky: Portrait of an Outstanding Agronomist¹

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Samuil (Shmuel-Aba) Efimovich (Haimovich) Lubarsky was born on December 30, 1878 (Julian calendar)² in the town of Alexandria in the Kherson Gubernia³, now the Kirovograd Region. His family lived in a brick two-storey house. His father owned a brick kiln on the opposite bank of the small Ingulets River and traded in building materials. There were 5 children in the family besides Samuil.

In 1900, Samuil passed his school matriculation examinations as an external student⁴, entered the Kiev Polytechnic Institute and graduated in 1907 as an agronomist. His studies lasted longer than usual because he was expelled for a period of two years for taking part in student unrest in 1901. Once he was even arrested and detained for 3-4 days. His parents could not afford to send him abroad to study since at that time Yakov and Berta, their two elder children were already being educated in Munich and Lausanne. In 1904, while still a student, Samuil married Zinaida Iosifovna (Osipovna) Boguslavskaya, also a native of Alexandria. A year later their daughter Lea was born, which was a heavy strain on their small budget⁵.

It was not easy for a Jewish agronomist to get a good job. After graduation, in 1908 - 1909, Samuil Lubarsky worked at the Kiev Gubernia Zemstvo⁶, but this was not a permanent job. In 1909, he was offered a position at the Novo-Poltavsky Jewish Agricultural School where children of farmers from Jewish agricultural colonies in Kherson and Yekaterinoslav Gubernias⁷ studied. In 1910, he began teaching in the school, and in 1911 became a principal of the school and manager of its farm. This work was completely consonant with Samuil's weltanschauung. He was not religious, saw no future for Zionism and seemed to uphold the "ORT view" that "productivization," that is, productive labor, was the way to make the Jewish people healthier, and ensure their future contentment⁸.

The school was located near the Novo-Poltavka Jewish agricultural colony, 80 verst⁹ from the town of Nikolayev. It had been established and was run by the Department for Agriculture and

¹ This article was written with support of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, JDC. The author is grateful to Jonathan Dekel-Chen for his critique. A newspaper version of the article entitled "Lubarsky's Life Story" was published in Israel's *Vesty* newspaper on 8.8.2002. The author would like to thank Yan Toporovsky for helping him write and publish the newspaper version of the article.

² See a copy of the birth certificate of S. Lubarsky in the family archives of Abram Samuilovich Lubarsky, the son of S. E. Lubarsky. Further see archives of A. Lubarsky. The author would like to thank A. S. Lubarsky (Maalot, Israel) for allowing access to his archives and for a wonderful story about his father; Lea Levintan, A few words about my father Samuil Efimovich Lubarsky. Manuscript. P. 1. (More: About my father). The archive of A. Lubarsky.

³ An administrative territorial unit in the Russian Empire.

⁴ A copy of the certificate of high school examinations, 1901. The archive of A. Lubarsky.

⁵ Central Archives of the Federal Security Service of the Russian Federation. File #18155. P.12. More: Lubarsky's Case, 1938. A copy of a part of Lubarsky's case is stored in the archives of A. Lubarsky. About my father. P. 1-2.

⁶ Local assembly that functioned as a body of provincial self-government in Russia from 1864 to 1917.

⁷ On Jewish agricultural colonies in the 19th century see: *Baron S.* The Russian Jew Under Tsars and Soviets. New York, 1976. P. 77-80.

⁸ About my father. P.3.

⁹ Verst is a Russian measure of linear distance equivalent to about two thirds of a mile (1.06 km).

the Jewish Colonization Association (JCA)¹⁰. At the same time, Lubarsky served as a JCA's authorized agent for agronomic support of the Jewish colonies. The school had 300 desyatinas¹¹ of farmland on which the students were getting practical knowledge and skills in field-crop cultivation, dairy and poultry farming, hog-breeding, apiculture, horticulture and vine-growing¹².

Life was good in Novo-Poltavka. In 1910 Lubarsky's son Abram (Amochka) was born, and they felt confident of the future. The overthrow of the monarchy instilled new hope. The family decided to move to Kremenchug and open a Jewish high school for boys. For some reason they delayed their departure and this delay resulted in a tragedy. On Saturday, December 28, 1918, armed robbers burst into the school and wounded Lubarsky and his wife. Three days later Zinaida Iosifovna died of her wounds¹³. But this was only the first blow. In May 1919, during the pogrom staged by the Grigoriev gang in Alexandria, Lubarsky's parents, sister and brother were all killed. His other sister died of typhoid fever, and his close friend was murdered by bandits¹⁴.

The death of his wife, whom he loved dearly, and of his relatives was a hard blow, but the thought that he must raise his children brought him out of depression. He remarried many years later, when the children were already firmly on their feet. This happened a few months before his second arrest¹⁵.

Numerous raids by various gangs wreaked havoc on the school, and in 1920 Lubarsky moved to Nikolayev where he secured an agronomist's position at the Gubernia Land Department. Here he suggested introducing new farming methods and so-called "field rotation with 3-4 different sowing areas, one of which was to lie fallow or be used for tilled crops¹⁶." Lubarsky reported his proposed innovations at a meeting at the Gubernia Land Department. His report was published as a separate booklet. The crop rotation method became widespread at the farms of the steppe areas in the Ukraine.

In 1922, Joseph (Iosif Borisovich) Rosen¹⁷, a Russian-born well-known American agronomist came to Nikolayev in the capacity of a representative of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee. He got in touch with Lubarsky and suggested that Lubarsky take part in organizing assistance for the Jewish colonies, which had suffered badly from pogroms and famine. Lubarsky agreed. He moved to Kharkov (then Ukrainian capital) and established an agronomy

¹⁰ Jewish Colonization Association was established in 1891 by Baron Morris Hirsh in London in order to arrange for bringing masses of Jews from the Russian Empire to Argentina and teaching them agricultural skills. Since these plans were being implemented only partially and with difficulty, JCA began to finance and train Jews to become farmers in Russia itself.

¹¹ 1 desyatina is equal to 2.7 acres

¹² About my father. P. 5; Personal testimony of prisoner Samuil Efimovich Lubarsky. Lubarsky's Case, 1938. P. 14.

¹³ Nalet na sel'skokhozyaistvennuiu fermu v Novo-Poltavke (Raid at the agricultural farm in Novo-Poltavka) // Trudovaya Gazeta. - Nikolaev, 1919. - January 1st; About my father, P. 7-8.

¹⁴ Izvestiya Nikolayevskogo Sovieta rabochikh i krestyanskikh deputatov, - Nikolaev, 1919 - July 5th; About my father. P. 8.

¹⁵ Lubarsky's second wife, Anna Georgievna was Greek and 15 years his junior.

¹⁶ About my father. P. 9.

¹⁷ Rosen, Joseph (1877, Moscow – 1949, New York), American agronomist. At the age of 17, he fled to Germany from Siberia where he lived in exile. He studied agronomy and agriculture, first in Heidelberg University, then, after immigrating to the USA, at the Michigan Agricultural College and University in the State of Minnesota. Since Rosen still felt deep affection for Russia, he tried to promote its progress in the field of agriculture. In the middle of 1910-s, he grew a new sort of winter wheat that was named after him and became quite common at American farms. Since 1921, he was the JDC representative in Russia, and in 1924 – 1938 served as director of Agro-Joint corporation aimed at helping Soviet Jews, who were mainly destitute and deprived of their rights, to become farmers. In 1939, Rosen tried to find out, on behalf of the JDC, whether British Guiana and Dominican Republic would agree to receive Jewish refugees from Europe. One of the streets in Santo Domingo bears his name (Kratkaya evreiskaya entsyclopedia (Concise Jewish Encyclopedia), V. 7. pp. 253-254).

department at the JDC Kharkov office, working in parallel at the Ukrainian SSR People's Commissariat of Land Management¹⁸. The JDC Agronomy Department helped Jewish colonies in the Kherson and Yekaterinoslav gubernias by supplying them with seed, horses, cows, farm machines and by teaching them vine-growing techniques. The JDC Agronomy Department rendered services to the population through economic associations. By April 1923, the JDC had already established contacts with 24 associations operating in a region with 10,000 farms¹⁹.

Lubarsky believed that material and monetary assistance given for free had a demoralizing effect on peasants. Therefore, to boost the colonists' motivation to work, he practiced the policy of issuing loans payable from the future harvest. This practice was obstructed by the Soviet authorities, as the NKVD (Ministry of Interior) declared that "by taking promissory notes to be paid after the coming harvest, Lubarsky dooms Jewish colonists to slavery for the benefit of the French bankers entrenched in the JCA"²⁰. From the very beginning, NKVD distrusted Lubarsky and believed he was "definitely disloyal to the Soviet authorities". He was accused of giving preference to the Jewish peasants over non-Jewish ones when distributing the JDC funds, and of evading control on the part of the Soviet authorities. Yitzhak Sudarsky, head of the National Minorities Department and of its Jewish Division at the All-Ukrainian NKVD, also an agronomist, wrote in his report to the Central Committee of the Ukrainian Communist Party in 1923: "The policy which agronomist Lubarsky is pursuing in the Jewish colonies on behalf of the JDC and the JCA is undoubtedly dangerous and fraught with extremely undesirable complications." He demanded that Lubarsky be "removed from any management positions in the field of Jewish agricultural colonies"²¹. However, that time Lubarsky remained in office.

The JDC's most spectacular achievement in 1922-23 was the operation of the tractor unit consisting of 86 American "John Deer" tractors. They were divided into the Dobrynsky, Novo-Poltavsky, Seidemenushsky, Izluchsky, Gulyai-Polsky and Khlebodarovsky columns. An understanding was reached with the People's Commissariat of Land Management that the JDC would supply fuel and lubricants and would plow the land free of charge. In return, all surplus crops would remain in the regions where they were harvested, and used for social help. In 1923, as much as 100,000 acres was plowed, with more than half of this area belonging to non-Jewish villages adjacent to the land of the Jewish colonies²².

Soviet red tape was a perpetual obstacle to the JDC's regular work: there were delays in issuing oil products, Odessa customs refused to allow the tractors in duty-free, which threatened to disrupt the spring field work. After tremendous effort, including an application to Christian Rakovsky, Chairman of the Council of People's Commissars of the Ukraine, the tractors were cleared by customs²³.

In 1924, the JDC set up the Agro-Joint, a corporation conceived as an agency facilitating the process of turning USSR Jews into farmers²⁴. The move was prompted by the fact that the revolution, the Civil War and sovietization had made thousands of Jews destitute. In addition to

¹⁸ Lubarsky's Case, 1938. P. 16.

¹⁹ The Central State Archives of the Ukrainian Supreme Government and Management Authorities (CSAUSGMA). Collection 261. Record 1. File 253. P. 103.

²⁰ CSAUSGMA. C. 261. R. 1. F. 15. P. 40.

²¹ CSAUSGMA. C. 5. R. 1. F. 2240. P. 51-52.

²² CSAUSGMA. C. 261. R. 1. F. 59. P. 31.

²³ CSAUSGMA. C. 261. R. 1. F. 62. P. 77.

²⁴ For Agro-Joint see: *Dekel-Chen J.L.* Shopkeepers and Peddlers into Soviet Farmers: Jewish Agricultural Colonization in Crimea and South Ukraine, 1924-1941. PhD Thesis. Brandeis University, 2001 (below: *Dekel-Chen*); *Bauer Y.* My Brother's Keeper: A History of the America Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, 1929-1939. Philadelphia, JPS, 1974. P. 57-104; *Szajkowski Z.* The Mirage of American Jewish Aid in Soviet Russia, 1917-1939. New York, 1977.

this, a large number of craftsmen and small traders had been declared exploiters and were deprived of many rights. Among the rest, the “deprived” (*lishentsy*) were not put on the waiting list for municipal housing, were refused free medical care and unemployment allowance, their children had difficulties in getting higher education²⁵. Settling them in the countryside and teaching them farming was seen as a way out. After the Jewish *lishentsy* have turned farmers, their rights would be restored.

The Agro-Joint signed an agreement with the USSR government which obligated the USSR to allocate uncultivated land in northern Crimea and southern Ukraine to former shtetl residents who wanted to become farmers. To organize and facilitate their resettlement, the KOMZET, Committee for Land Settlement of Jewish Workers, which was headed by Piotr Smidovich, Deputy Chairman of the All-Union Central Executive Committee was established at the Committee. Another agency working toward the same objective was the OZET “voluntary” society. Incidentally, Shmuel Weizmann, brother of the first President of Israel, sat on the OZET Board. The Agro-Joint undertook to provide economic help to settlers, teach them advanced farming methods, and supply them with seed, pedigree cattle, tractors and other farm machines. The Agro-Joint project certainly competed with Zionist plans for the settlement of Eretz Israel. For the Zionists, this meant losing some of the funds raised by US Jews, but the American Jews often preferred to donate money for Jewish colonization in the USSR because it was much cheaper than colonization in British mandatory Palestine²⁶.

The colonization of the Crimea began and proceeded with amazing success despite the opposition of the party and the Soviet elite among the Crimean Tatars. The JDC attempted to ease the tension by offering funds for Tatar land management as well. Thus, in 1926 almost a fourth of the JDC budget in the Crimea was spent on aid to the Tatar population²⁷. However, the opposition of the Crimean authorities to the JDC continued. The Ukrainian government also opposed the allocation of land in southern Ukraine to Jews. In the course of the meeting between Rosen and top officers of the People’s Commissariat of Land Management of the Ukraine held in late 1924, Rosen was told that “the All-Ukrainian Central Executive Committee has decided to resume the transfer of redundant labor resources, in particular the unemployed Jewish population, to the eastern regions of the USSR ...” Lubarsky, who was present at the meeting, objected: “The East is no good, it requires the energy of an Ukrainian pioneer, while Jews need developed regions...”²⁸.

Lubarsky quit his work at the People’s Commissariat of Land Management to become JDC authorized agent in the Ukraine and the Crimea. In 1926 he was appointed deputy director of the Agro-Joint and moved to Moscow. Together with Rosen and other co-workers he settled at 7 Granatny Pereulok, in the former A. Leman’s mansion where the Agro-Joint main office was located. Today the building houses the Central Union of Architects²⁹.

²⁵ On *lishentsy* see: *Kimerling E.* Civil Rights and Social Policy in Soviet Russia // *Russian Review*. 1982. #41 (1). P. 24-46.

²⁶ Setting up a new agricultural colony in the USSR cost 200 – 250 dollars; in Palestine it cost 5,000 dollars (*Dekel-Chen*. P. 78).

²⁷ Jewish farmer / 1926, Collected articles №2. P. 249.

²⁸ *Kostyrchenko, G.* Tainaya politika Stalina (Stalin’s Secret Policy). M., 2001. P. 95.

²⁹ JDC is not cited in most Moscow publications related to the history of the “House of Architects”. See *Romanyuk, SK*, *Iz istorii moskovskikh pereulokov* (From the History of Moscow Lanes), M., 1988; *Kabanova, L.* *Iz istorii tsentral'nogo doma arkhitektoev* (From the History of the central “House of Architects”) // *Arkhitekturnyi vestnik*, 2000. №53; *Hait, V.L.* *Osobnyak v Granatnom pereulke* (The Mansion in Granatny Pereulok) // *Moskovskii zhurnal*, 2000. №6. The author thanks Nina Spivakova for this reference.

Upon familiarizing himself with the activities of the HeHalutz³⁰ agricultural communes of Tel Hai, Mishmar, Maayan and others that were already operating in the Crimea, Lubarsky and his associates became convinced that good results could only be achieved if Jews focused on high-yield crops and rejected traditional farming methods. They counted on inherent Jewish brightness, which they hoped would make up for lack of farming skills. This remained the principle of the Agro-Joint's activities until its liquidation³¹.

Lubarsky was utterly absorbed in his work in Jewish land management. An agronomist supervisor was appointed for each colonization district. For the most part, they were former students of Lubarsky, graduates of the Novo-Poltavsky Agricultural School. These agronomists were not just consultants on crop-growing. They took an active part in all aspects of the colonies' life at all stages, lending a helping hand in everything: land allotment, building villages, accepting new members, digging wells, arranging water supplies or cattle breeding³². They also regularly reported to the Agro-Joint on the situation in the colonies.

Lubarsky and his subordinates tried to use the latest methods: they introduced land rotation, taught settlers how to dig super-deep wells, brought electricity to villages (when the Russian village lay in darkness), induced settlers to plant orchards and vineyards, which had never been done in the Crimea's steppe region, built irrigation facilities, and opened factories for processing agricultural products to help farmers increase profits by selling finished goods. The experience of the JDC tractor units of 1922-23 was also used to offer the villages tractor and other equipment services in a centralized way. At first the central tractor fleet was located at the HeHalutz Mishmar commune but then it was moved to the repair center in the city of Djankoi. Later this scheme was used when MTS (machine and tractor stations) were being organized³³.

Conflicts sometimes occurred. Colonists would complain that the Agro-Joint agronomists did not pay due attention to their daily problems and that sometimes the answer to their complaints was: "If they don't like it here, they can go to Eretz Israel³⁴." In these circumstances, Rosen and Lubarsky were seen as the highest court.

In 1929, the Agro-Joint built a farm-machinery repair plant in Djankoi. In the beginning of 1937, the plant employed 664 people³⁵. It was a well-equipped model plant. Shortly before it was taken over by the state, it even produced lathes. In the late 1930s, the Soviet authorities saw to it that the Agro-Joint top officials who were responsible for the transfer of the plant to the state were arrested only after the transfer had been finalized.

The colonization brought about impressive results: up to 150,000 Soviet Jews moved to the area of 400,000 hectares and built hundreds of agricultural farms there. Total Agro-Joint investment in colonization amounted to 16 million dollars, the equivalent of about 200 million dollars in today's prices, not counting long-term loans³⁶.

The OGPU³⁷ first arrested Lubarsky in August 1930, at the peak of the collectivization, in connection with the so called "agronomists' case"³⁸, when Lubarsky was already living in

³⁰ HeHalutz (Pioneer) – Zionist youth movement which trained its members for productive (mostly physical) labor in Erets Israel. Left (Class) HeHalutz organization was legal in the Soviet Union in 1923-1928.

³¹ *Dekel-Chen*. P. 79.

³² About my father. P. 12.

³³ *Takao Ch*. The Origin of the Machine Tractor Station in the USSR: A new Perspective. Sapporo, 2002.

³⁴ *Dekel-Chen*. P. 221.

³⁵ The State Archives in the Crimean Autonomous Republic (SACAR). C. 2094. R. 1. F. 10. P. 189.

³⁶ *Dekel-Chen*. P.4.

³⁷ The Ob'edinennoe gosudarstvennoe politicheskoe upravlenie pri Sovnarkome (United State Political Management by the Council of Peoples Comissars) – Soviet secrete police in 1922-1934, continuation of the VeCheKa.

Moscow. Together with another agronomist, David Ginsburg³⁹, Lubarsky was sent to the Butyrsky prison. Charges against him were brought under clauses 7, 11 and 12 of Article 58 of the Criminal Code of the Ukrainian SSR. The indictment stated that “during his work at the People’s Commissariat of Land Management of the Ukrainian SSR Lubarsky joined an illegal counter-revolutionary organization of farmers aimed at fighting the Soviet authorities, overthrowing the government and establishing a bourgeois democracy. Instructed by the organization, S. E. Lubarsky wittingly distorted the government’s directives concerning the development and strengthening of the Socialist sector and promoted the development and growth of strong kulak farms, which were regarded by the organization as a crucial factor in the final fight for power with the Soviet authorities”.

“As an Agro-Joint employee, Lubarsky S.E. used the unofficial funds of this organization (the Agro-Joint) in *chervontsy*⁴⁰ smuggled from abroad to finance individual Zionists and Zionist organizations in the USSR⁴¹.”

As a matter of fact, the Agro-Joint did render assistance to some Zionists, not to mention the HeHalutz agricultural settlements in the Crimea. When interrogated, Lubarsky admitted that Rosen had been giving money to Dan Pines, chairman of the legal (left) HeHalutz⁴² for aid to those leaving for Eretz Israel. Lubarsky denied having personally participated in this activity and did not plead guilty in any of the charges.

While awaiting trial in prison, Lubarsky did not lose heart. He delivered lectures to his cell-mates on the history of china – he had a collection of antique china and was well-versed on the subject⁴³. Having a relatively high salary, Lubarsky purchased antique items in antique shops and from individuals during his numerous business trips. He wrote in one of his letters to his children: “I bought two antique Italian vases and also a beautiful ivory box for you, Lilichka, in an antique shop. As you know, there is someone in Simferopol by name of Miron Moiseevich Gitlevsky who is married to Olga Ivanovna whose aunt is married to an attorney who shares my love for china toys. I went to this aunt’s home with Gitlevsky and bought a number of interesting articles...”⁴⁴

Lubarsky’s sentence pronounced by the OGPU Special Jury on April 30, 1930 was relatively light: Lubarsky was “merely” deprived of the right to live in 12 USSR cities for three years⁴⁵. He chose to live in Kursk and, hating to waste time, started learning English, genetics and

³⁸ “Agronomists’ case”: reference to a case opened in 1929 against dozens of members of the All-Ukrainian Association of Agronomists accused of opposing collectivization, strengthening individual farms, instilling “petty-bourgeois” relations in the Soviet agricultural system. See *Zheleznogorsky, G. Kontrevoliutsia v sel'skom khozyaistve krainy* (Counter-Revolution in the Ukrainian Agriculture) // *Visti VUTsIK*. 1930. №№120, 121. According to some data, 46 people were arrested in connection to this case, including 6 Jews. See: *Pristaiko, V.I. Delo o kontrevoliutsionnoi organizatsii v sel'skom khozyaistve* (The Case of a Counter-Revolutionary Organization in Agriculture) // *Zhertvy repressii* (Victims of Repressions). Kiev, 1993. P. 133-142. The author would like to thank Olga Steshenko for this reference.

³⁹ Ginsburg David Lazarevich. Since March 1925 – agronomist, head of the department for agricultural statistics and experimental activities at Agro-Joint in Kharkov. Since 1927, head of the Agro-Joint Statistical Department in Moscow. From 1.06.1931 till 1937 he was a consulting agronomist at the Chief Office of Agro-Joint in Moscow. He retired on 6.12.1937 due to disability (1 category). (State Archives of the Russian Federation, C.7746. R.2. F.95. P. 2, 14, 20, 32, 59).

⁴⁰ A Russian gold coin and a Soviet monetary unit and gold coin worth ten rubles

⁴¹ Case H-7185 (№102735). The Central Archives of the Federal Security Service of the Russian Federation. P. 16-17 (More: Lubarsky's Case, 1930). A copy of part of Lubarsky’s case is stored in A. Lubarsky’s archive.

⁴² Lubarsky's Case, 1930. P. 19.

⁴³ About my father. P. 13, 15.

⁴⁴ S. Lubarsky’s letter, undated. A. Lubarsky’s archive.

⁴⁵ Lubarsky's Case, 1930. P. 53.

mathematics. He was soon amnestied, probably with Rosen's intercession, and in November 1931 returned to Moscow and was reinstated in his position⁴⁶.

While he lived in Kursk, his son Abram was enrolled in the Moscow Auto-Tractor Institute. This was not easily achieved due to his "non-proletarian" origin. Nevertheless, he was admitted despite his father's conviction. Lubarsky was in raptures: "I have just received your cable saying that Amochka has entered the ATI, it is the happiest period of my life. I didn't feel so happy when I was enrolled myself. I couldn't believe that after we had got rid of the quota for Jewish students it would be so difficult for my son to get enrolled in a technical institute. Perhaps these obstacles only increase the significance of his enrollment."⁴⁷

Lubarsky's bond with his children was very strong, especially with his daughter who followed in his footsteps. Away from home, inspecting kolkhozes, or living in exile in Kursk, he wrote to them regularly. His letters betray his emotional nature; he was not shy to express his feelings in superlatives. He believed that the Russians were unemotional and indifferent. In another letter from Kursk he wrote to his daughter: "The day before yesterday my landlady got an official letter from a Moscow prosecutor informing her that the case of her husband would not be reopened. She shed a few tears and was calm again and the children didn't seem to attach any importance to it. It looks like these people are incapable of strong feelings. Jews feel much more strongly and much more poignantly"⁴⁸.

Although he was not a believer, the feeling of belonging to the Jewish people made him visit the synagogue. In a letter dated September 1931 he wrote from Kursk: "It is the eve of Yom Kippur, the Day of Judgment. So many recollections and so many traditions are related to this day. On Rosh Hashanah, Dav. Laz. (evidently Ginsburg – M.B.) and I went to the synagogue. It was overcrowded. We estimate the number of people in the men's section at over 500. You can see that the traditions *are* strong"⁴⁹.

His interests were not limited to Jewish culture. In Simferopol he went to the local Tatar theatre. His associates wondered what could have taken him there, they had never thought of such a visit. "I enjoyed the performance tremendously. My neighbors on the right and on the left were translating for me. The audience was mixed; there were many young people and elderly men and women. It is hard to say what interested me more, what was going on the stage, or the audience, who actively participated in the performance and reacted to it with keen interest and emotion. The actors were playing very well"⁵⁰. These words belonged to the same Lubarsky who back in 1925 accused the Tatar leadership of the Crimean Autonomous Republic, not without reason, of opposing the Jewish colonization⁵¹. Although Lubarsky defended the interests of the Jews, he did not dislike Tatars in the least.

Collectivization and industrialization affected the progress of the Jewish land management activities. This is what Lubarsky's daughter writes about this period: "After returning to Moscow (in 1931 – M. B.), my father continued to work for Agro-Joint, but his working conditions started to gradually deteriorate. Jewish settlers, especially the young ones, who had learned farming trade and regained their voting rights in the colonies, wanted to return to towns. Their drive was supported by rapid development of industry and the need for manpower. Total

⁴⁶ About my father. P. 13.

⁴⁷ S. Lubarsky's letter to his children. 13.10.1931. A. Lubarsky's archive.

⁴⁸ S. Lubarsky's letter. 22.10.193. A. Lubarsky's Archive.

⁴⁹ S. Lubarsky's letter. 20.9.1931. A. Lubarsky's Archive.

⁵⁰ S. Lubarsky's letter to children. 14.10.1933. A. Lubarsky's Archive.

⁵¹ *Dekel-Chen*. P. 192-191.

collectivization launched in 1929 boosted this process. Many agronomists who had built agricultural colonies with my father were also leaving”⁵².

The agronomists were also leaving because they learned from the experience of Lubarsky's and Ginsburg's arrest that working for the Agro-Joint was potentially dangerous. According to Lubarsky's son Abram, when his father returned from Kursk, he advised Yuli Markovich Levintan, his son-in-law, who worked as an agronomist for the Agro-Joint Yevpatoriya branch, to look for a better job. Levintan did resign and, thus, managed to avoid arrest in the late 30s.

Meanwhile the relations between the Agro-Joint and the Soviet government were getting ever more complicated. In the 30s, the Agro-Joint remained the only foreign organization that had first-hand knowledge of what was going on in the Soviet rural areas.

In the atmosphere of a general spy fever, NKVD could no longer tolerate this situation. The authorities were constantly narrowing the Agro-Joint's scope of activities, and arrested its agronomists and top officials one after another. “The political situation in the USSR that had shaped by 1936-37 could not but tell on the Agro-Joint activities. The tightening of the administrative and punitive measures, summary arrests of Jewish colonists, harassment of foreign specialists made the operation of the Corporation impossible...

“All the problems related to the termination of the Agro-Joint activities were tackled by S.E. Lubarsky, Dr. Rosen's deputy...⁵³”

Seeing that his employees were in danger, Joseph Rosen, the Agro-Joint director, decided to assume (in vain) responsibility for his organization. On December 16, 1937, he wrote in his letter to the NKVD from Paris: “It has been brought to my knowledge by the wives of Jewish doctors from Germany who at one time, with the help of our organization, were given the opportunity to practice their profession in the Soviet Union that NKVD arrested some of our employees. As the Agro-Joint director I consider it my duty to declare that if our organization has been found guilty of any unlawful actions, it is I personally who is liable for them, not our employees or my deputies. Hereby I am asking to give me the opportunity to testify before the relevant Soviet agencies on all the questions pertaining to the activities of our organization in the USSR. I am hereby expressing my consent not to resort to the help of any diplomatic sources since the matter concerns me alone.”⁵⁴

Samuil Lubarsky, the 60-year old agronomist, was one of the last Agro-Joint officers to be arrested. He was arrested on March 27, 1938, and accused of having been a German spy since 1925 and an American spy since 1926 who recruited Agro-Joint employees for work in his spy network. In prison, they confiscated all he had on him: 201 rubles 65 kopeks, as well as “a small old leather suitcase, cuff-links - 3, collars – 3, a small pillow, a muffler, a tie, a soap-holder, a toothbrush case, a comb case, suspenders, garters, a comb, a clothes-brush, tooth paste and a nail-file.”⁵⁵

Neither his wife or his children were arrested. By that time his son had graduated from the institute, which was turned into a military academy. The apartment was not taken away from them. Only Lubarsky's personal effects and furniture were confiscated. Even Lubarsky's

⁵² About my father. P. 13-14.

⁵³ *Barkovets, A.* Ob osnovnykh etapakh deyatelnosti "Agro-Jointa" v SSSR (On the main stages of the Agro-Joint activity in the USSR) // *Vestnik evreiskogo universiteta v Moskve*. 1996. № 2 (12). P. 140.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.* P. 141.

⁵⁵ Lubarsky's Case, 1938. P. 4, 9-10, 122-125.

valuable china collection was not taken. It was stolen later, during the war, when the family was evacuated from Moscow⁵⁶.

It took the investigators three months to force Lubarsky write a short statement addressed to investigator Gorelkin in which he “confessed” that in 1926, the Agro-Joint director Joseph Rosen had recruited him for espionage activities against the Soviet Union. For this purpose, he had allegedly used Agro-Joint representatives in the Crimea and in the Ukraine⁵⁷. We have no information on the course of interrogations that followed. We only know that some of Lubarsky’s arrested associates were forced to testify against him.

By July 20th, the indictment was ready. Lubarsky was accused of the following:

- a) Serving as an agent of German and American intelligence agencies and directing the activities of the espionage, sabotage and terrorist organization he had established;
- b) Directing this organization in the course of the preparations for assassination of comrades Molotov and Kaganovich and for organization of a number of sabotage acts in the event of invasion of the USSR by a capitalist country;
- c) Organizing sabotage activities against the Ukrainian agricultural system;
- d) Providing financial aid to Zionists and clerics adhering to anti-Soviet views,

i.e. of activities coming within article 58-6-7-8-11 of the Criminal Code of the UkrSSR⁵⁸.

Lubarsky pleaded guilty to everything except for organization of sabotage and terrorist acts. His trial was held on September 1, 1938. Lubarsky was tried by a military tribunal, that is, the Military Panel of the USSR Supreme Court, with military lawyer Ivan Matulevich as presiding judge. For this trial, a short procedure was used that had been first introduced on the day of Kirov’s assassination, on December 1, 1934. It was a trial in camera without counsel for the defense or prosecution, without witnesses being called. The whole procedure, from the opening of the court session to the pronouncement of the sentence, took 15 minutes. The accused pleaded guilty and asked the court to “be merciful and spare his life.” The judges, however, had no mercy. He was sentenced to be shot, with confiscation of his personal effects. They also ruled that the sentence should be “executed immediately.” That very night Lubarsky was shot at the Butovo shooting ground near “Kommunarka” state farm⁵⁹.

In an attempt to save her father, Lea Levintan, Doctor of Philosophy (Agricultural Sciences), lodged complaints at all levels and wrote to the Prosecutor-General, to Molotov and Stalin. Appealing to Stalin as a Caucasian, she wrote that her father had done much to develop vine-growing in the steppe regions⁶⁰. It was useless, because by then Agro-Joint deputy director was already dead.

With regard to the case of 1938, Lubarsky was rehabilitated in 1959 for “absence of corpus delicti”⁶¹. Having learned about it, Vladimir Konstantinovich Redkin⁶², former director of the Agro-Joint Crimean office, who had also suffered repression in the end of 1930-s, wrote to Lea

⁵⁶ About my father. P. 15.

⁵⁷ Lubarsky's Case, 1938. P. 13.

⁵⁸ Lubarsky's Case, 1938. P. 124.

⁵⁹ Lubarsky's Case, 1938. P. 127-130. Rasstrel'nyie spiski. Moskva, 1937-1941. "Kommunarka," Butovo (List of the people executed. Moscow, 1937-1941. "Kommunarka", Butovo. A Memorial Book for the Victims of Political Repressions). M., 2000. P. 257.

⁶⁰ Lubarsky's Case, 1938. P. 132-141.

⁶¹ Lubarsky's Case, 1938, without page number.

⁶² Vladimir Konstantinovich Redkin – agronomist, until 1937 head of the Simferopol offices of Agro-Joint.

and her husband: "...Today my thoughts are only about you and there is a festive mood in our family. I am back home with a bad flu and mostly in bed. But after I got your letter I put on my clothes and even had some wine to drink the happiness and health of all of you, including the grandchildren, and mainly the memory of our dear and beloved Samuil Efimovich. We will always remember him as the best person I have ever met on my journey through life ..."⁶³

Another surviving associate of Lubarsky's, Aron Ilyich Lapiro⁶⁴, wrote on this occasion: "He, Samuil Efimovich, had much love for the people (at the time, the author avoided writing "the Jewish people", although there is no doubt this is what he really meant – M.B.) and he sacrificed his entire bright and spirited life for the sake of this love."⁶⁵

As many as 60 years after Lubarsky's death, 94-year-old Bela Ruvimovna Shmuglyakova, former secretary at the Agro-Joint Crimean office, spoke about Lubarsky with great warmth and affection: "He was a very kind man, nice, good-natured... He was interested in literally everything, and he was a real leader."⁶⁶

With regard to the case of 1930, Lubarsky was rehabilitated only in 1989 in the framework of the general rehabilitation in the country⁶⁷.

It would be interesting to follow up on the fate of Lubarsky's favorite brainchild, the Jewish agricultural colonization.

By the end of the 1930s, Soviet villages were completely enslaved. Below is an extract from a private letter sent from a Jewish kolkhoz in the Crimea to Leningrad dating approximately to 1938. I store this letter in my family archive.

"It is a pity that although you are reading about it, you do not hear on what conditions you can have these good things (meaning that the addressee does not understand the real situation when reading newspaper articles about happy life of the kolkhozniks – M. B.). First, men must report at least 300 working days and comply with the production quotas; women must report at least 250 working days; the quotas have doubled... Concerning your questions on pension or some kind of aid for kolkhozniks, we do not dare even mention it... There is one man here who has 402 workdays on his last year record, and now he is a guard (i.e. he can no longer work in the fields – M. B.), and the director asks him why does he stay in the kolkhoz, why doesn't he join his children (i.e. the kolkhoz tries to get rid of yesterday's outstanding workers when they grow old – M. B.). Abram does not go out for weeks for fear of meeting one of the bosses (he is ill and does not work – M. B.), and when we hear on the kolkhoz radio "Attention, the kolkhoz speaking", our hearts sink for fear of being summoned to the director, because every day someone is called to come there, and this is as being called to the Last Judgment"⁶⁸.

Now let us return to the memoirs of Lea Levintan:

"My father and his associates have worked for years without sparing themselves, enthusiastically and arduously, because they believed they were working for a good cause. Indeed, they built comfortable villages where Jewish colonists could live and work. However, all this was lost

⁶³ V. K. Redkin's letter, 20.10.1959. A. Lubarsky's Archive.

⁶⁴ A. I. Lapiro – agronomist, former head of one of the agricultural areas in the Crimea.

⁶⁵ A. I. Lapiro's letter to Yuli and Lea Levintan, 3.11.1959. A. Lubarsky's Archive.

⁶⁶ Audio interview with B. R. Shmuglyakova, 1999. The Archives of Hesed Shimon Museum, Simferopol. The author would like to thank Mikhail Tyagly and Natalia Vysotsky for allowing him to use this interview.

⁶⁷ Lubarsky's Case, 1930. P. 104-105.

⁶⁸ M. Beiser's personal archive.

during the Great Patriotic War. Only a tiny part of the settlers were evacuated in time, the majority were killed by fascists. Those agronomists, who survived in 1937, were killed by fascists. Those villages still exist, but today they are populated by non-Jews”⁶⁹.

As a matter of fact, some settlers returned to the former Jewish kolkhozes after the war, and some of them even held key positions there⁷⁰, however, it was just a trifle, and should Lubarsky lived to see it, he would consider this to be a complete failure. At the end of the war, the Soviet government attempted to persuade the JDC to invest funds in restoring agriculture in the Crimea, and even presented some exaggerated figures of surviving Jews living in the Crimea, but the JDC did not show any interest in the idea.⁷¹.

⁶⁹ About my father. P. 14.

⁷⁰ *Dekel-Chen J.* Soviet-Jewish Agricultural Colonists, 1937-1945 // *Jews in Eastern Europe*. 2001. #3 (46). P. 34-57.

⁷¹ *Mitsel, M.* Programmy Amerikanskogo evreiskogo ob'edinennogo raspredelitel'nogo kommiteta v SSSR, 1943-1947 gg. (Programs of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee in the USSR, 1943-1947) // *Vestnik evreiskogo universiteta*. 2003. №8 (in print).